

ARTICLE APPEARED

ON PAGE A-19

2 January 1986

ESSAY | William Safire

# To Majority Rule

WASHINGTON

**H**ard-liners in the intelligence "community" were somewhat spooked last week when they received their daily intelligence briefing from the State Department.

In a six-part series on South Africa, classified "confidential" (meaning "if this gets out, it's no big deal"), an analyst in State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research wrote: "The ruling National Party, still the dominant force in South African politics, has the ability to move toward genuine power sharing with blacks, or to deny political rights over the near term."

Innocuous enough. Then came the line that shot up eyebrows-only across the river: "Eventually, however, international pressure, domestic turmoil and demographic trends will bring majority rule to South Africa."

"Majority rule" is a phrase spoken with reverence in the U.S., which fought a Civil War to seal it in our democratic system. But in South Africa, where nonwhites outnumber whites 4 to 1, majority rule means black rule — with all its fears of a vengeful oppression of the white minority — and few whites who today outspokenly denounce apartheid espouse black rule.

In fact, the dreaded prospect of autocratic rule in the name of a majority as it exists elsewhere in so much of Africa is what freezes progress toward one man, one vote. A majority that tramples on the rights of peaceful minorities has no moral claim on the right to govern them.

A State Department spokesman tells me that this surprisingly frank prediction of "majority rule" is the judgment of one intelligence analyst and is not necessarily the view of the United States; Bureau of Intelligence analysts are encouraged to put forward their candid opinions of likely outcomes; and that in this case, "eventually" could mean a long, long time.

Analysts in the Pentagon and C.I.A. know all those caveats, and many who still believe in "constructive engagement" consider State's assessment to be realistic. While deploring a mindset that makes such a conclusion a self-fulfilling prophecy, they observe that throughout this century, elites have frequently headed for the hills when popular pressure reached

## State Dept.'s prediction on South Africa

the blowoff point. Intelligence analysts have noted that a great many South African whites have already arranged for some other place to go, leaving the hard-core Afrikaners to circle their wagons.

Despite differences in methods, most Americans want the same goal in that country: an end to apartheid, freedom of movement and of the press, a peaceful transition from white rule to a type of government that establishes majority rule with iron-clad protections against the tyranny of the majority. In other words, we want South Africa to evolve quickly into a society much like ours, with the slight exception that its majority is black and ours is white.

The trouble is, that is not likely to happen. A more realistic prognosis is a continued cycle of violence and repression. Two different societies in the same place want the same resources, and "eventually" numbers will triumph over firepower.

That would not be a victory for majority rule as we think of it. A fine judicial system may be overthrown; reverse apartheid may come into being, with minority rights again denied; a radical regime would surely be more attracted to the Soviet bloc than the West; and the lives of millions would be endangered.

How do we help South Africans avoid that? Aside from helping Jonas Savimbi achieve majority rule in neighboring Angola, what can we do to prevent the spread of Communism in the darkening continent?

When realists are pessimists, the trick is to slip out of the clutches of realism. Knowing that moderate whites are most likely to be the first to leave, we should exhort them to stay; knowing that moderate blacks most likely be the first to be thrust aside by the radical politicians, we should still make heroes of the moderates. Knowing that removal of our support often brings down the bad

only to see them replaced by the worse, we should nonetheless shun the bad and seek out the better.

It could be that the prospect of a balance of terror will force an accommodation. If radical blacks threaten massacre, radical whites will threaten nuclear retaliation; as extremists approach that brink, moderate voices may not seem so unrealistic.

At that point, fear of a threat to common survival — not only "international pressure, domestic turmoil and demographic trends" — will bring majority rule to South Africa. □